

VZCZCXRO3563

PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHBK #0941/01 0850946

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 250946Z MAR 08

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2401

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0520

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2240

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8485

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 4389

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5721

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5306

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1998

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000941

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL FOR BUCKLEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL PINR KDEM TH

SUBJECT: PROMINENT THAI NGOS RELEASE REPORTS ON ABUSES IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 710 (ABUSE ON THE RISE)

B. BANGKOK 502 (ACTIVISTS FRET)

C. 07 BANGKOK 4201 (PRISONER ABUSE ALLEGATIONS)

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Two prominent Thai human rights groups have released detailed accounts of alleged widespread government abuses by security forces fighting the violent insurgency in southern Thailand since mid-2007. Citing first-hand testimony, interviews, photographic evidence, and government and media reports, the NGOs allege that army, police, and paramilitary village defense volunteers have extra-judicially killed, disappeared, and abused suspected insurgents. Photographic and documentary evidence that one NGO provided to the Embassy appears to support at least some of these abuse allegations. Following media reports of the March 21 death of an imam (Muslim cleric) in army custody, senior government officials announced they are investigating the suspicious death without "cover-ups." While previous such investigations have not resulted in serious punishment for officials involved in reported abuse, we will continue to encourage RTG officials to ensure their counter-insurgency efforts comply with international standards. End Summary.

NGO REPORT DOCUMENTS ALLEGED ABUSE

12. (U) The Working Group on Justice for Peace (WGJP), a prominent Thai human rights NGO, released on March 12 a highly-detailed 22-page report documenting alleged abuses committed since mid-2007 by government security forces combating the violent insurgency in the southern Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkhla. The report compiles accounts of five alleged extra-judicial killings, nine alleged incidents of detainee abuse, four suspected forced disappearances, and four incidents of alleged intimidation of human rights defenders. WGJP head Angkanna Neelaphajit, a leading Thai human rights activist, presented the report and its findings on March 12 to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva (ref A).

¶ 3. (U) The WGJP report claims that security forces, and in one case ethnic Thai Buddhist village defense volunteers, extra-judicially killed suspected insurgents and southern villagers during drive-by shootings, raids on ethnic Malay Muslim villages, and other "unprovoked" attacks in 2007 and January 2008. The report also claims that two individuals died under suspicious circumstances while in military or police custody in 2007. An annex in the report cites interviews with witnesses, security officials, and photographic evidence collected by NGOs in several instances. (Note: Some of these allegations were reported in our Thailand Country Report on Human Rights Practices. End note.)

¶ 4. (U) The WGJP report claims that torture is "systematic and widespread." Citing first-hand interviews with alleged victims, the group claims that the abuse is "carried out in military as well as paramilitary and special forces camps." The NGO's report documents incidents where detainees were reportedly "beaten, held naked in refrigerated rooms, forced to eat spoilt food, and received electric shocks to their genitals." Further, citing in at least once instance a hospital's official assessment, the report claims that "most victims suffer from punctured ear drums." The NGO alleges that medical attention was rarely offered to purported torture victims, and that medical professionals often refuse to examine victims, fearing retaliation by military officials.

¶ 5. (U) The WGJP report brings to light four cases in 2007 where persons in the South were allegedly disappeared, the first such reported disappearances since October 2006. NGOs told us in 2007 that they had received no confirmed reports of forced disappearances in the South that year. The WGJP

BANGKOK 00000941 002 OF 003

wrote that the allegations in their report were not made public earlier due to fears by relatives of the victims that they would face reprisals. The report states that all four cases were brought to the attention of local and national authorities, but to date the victims' relatives have not been contacted by law enforcement officials.

GROUPS PROVIDE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT CLAIMS

¶ 6. (C) On March 17, the Muslim Lawyers Center (MLC) provided us with a list of 39 reports their group had received of abuse and arbitrary arrest in the southern provinces. The WGJP partially cited this MLC list in their March report, and some of the MLC's findings were made public in a February human rights seminar in Bangkok (ref A). The MLC report provides, where available, the alleged location where an incident took place and the identifying information of the security force unit reportedly involved. Units and facilities that the MLC believed were involved in arbitrary arrest and alleged abuse include the 31st Military Taskforce, the 41st Paramilitary Regiment, the Ingkayut Borihan Fort in Pattani, the Bo Thong Military Fort in Pattani, the Pa Tae Police Station in Yala, and the Pileng Fort in Narathiwat. (Comment: Because sufficient details are often lacking, we are unable to definitively conclude based on the MLC list alone that the units and facilities named by the MLC were credibly involved in human rights abuses. End comment.)

¶ 7. (C) On March 24, WGJP officials provided us documentation which purports to prove several of the claims made in the WGJP report. Among the materials provided are photographs, some of them highly graphic, showing burns, cuts, and other signs of apparent abuse on the bodies of individuals cited in the report, including on the body of a student arrested in a January Yala raid (ref A) and on Ataree Sama-ae, who died while in government custody in July 2007 (ref C). The WGJP documentation also includes the transcript of testimony provided to the National Human Rights Commission, yet to be made public, detailing allegations of abuse at the Royal Thai Police's Forward Operations Command in Yala.

IMAM'S DEATH SPARKS OUTRAGE

¶18. (SBU) On March 21, WGJP and southern human rights NGOs received word that Yapa Kaseng, a 58-year old imam in Narathiwat Province, died earlier that morning while in government custody. The imam was reportedly detained in a raid on March 19, along with five other individuals. WGJP staff learned of the imam's death directly from the imam's relatives in the midst of a March 21 meeting with us. From March 21-22, WGJP and human rights activists successfully brought the incident to the attention of the media and responsible local officials, eventually prompting Army Commander-in-Chief General Anupong Paochinda to call for an autopsy and an official inquiry into the death on March 23.

¶19. (C) On March 23, a National Human Rights Commission official issued a statement to human rights groups saying he had been informed by a local undertaker that Yapa died from severe bodily injuries. The undertaker reportedly said that many of Yapa's ribs, several teeth, and all ten fingers had been broken, his forehead was swollen, and his legs had been wounded by solid objects. On March 24, the WGJP sent us a photograph of Yapa's body that appears to confirm some of these allegations. On March 24, Narathiwat Vice Governor Nipon Narapitakkul told us that results of the autopsy would be released shortly. Nipon told us that the autopsy results would be "straightforward," and would not "cover-up" the identity of any "wrongdoers." Nipon admitted that although he had not personally seen the deceased's body, he believed his death was a result of "bodily harm."

COMMENT

BANGKOK 00000941 003 OF 003

¶10. (C) We had earlier been briefed (ref A) on the contents of these reports. If anything, the documented accounts are even more disturbing. The WGJP report and the group's supporting documentation provide the most compelling evidence to date of human rights abuses in southern Thailand. We believe that several of these allegations are credible. The March 23 statement by Army Commander Anupong promising a full investigation into the March 21 death of imam Yapa Kaseng is a positive development. However, other senior government officials, including former Army Commander Sonthi Boonyaratglin, have also promised similar investigations which, at least so far, have yet to result in any official penalty aside from reassignment of the involved security officials. We will meet with senior RTG officials over the next several days and encourage them to fully investigate these troubling allegations. End Comment.

ALLEGED VICTIMS NAMED IN WGJP'S REPORT

¶11. (U) Alleged victims of extra-judicial killings:

-Abdulkari Kasor (March 9, 2007)

-A-isata Imbrahim (June 2, 2007)

(Note: The report referenced eight additional individuals who were killed, but did not provide their names. End note.)

¶12. (U) Alleged victims of disappearance:

-Loneeya Maneeya (July 11, 2007)

-Maya-deng Maranoh (date not available)

-Marudin Wava (August 22, 2007)

-Wae-asi Wae-su (November 2, 2007)

¶13. (U) Alleged victims of detainee abuse:

-Muhammad Arming Usuh (October 30, 2006)

-Sukree Ar-dam (April 11, 2007)

-Guyee Itae and Isamal Teh (January 27, 2008)

-Ahmeenudin Kayi (February 5, 2008)

(Note: Names of 7 individuals withheld at the request of the

victim. End note.)

¶14. (U) Human rights defenders allegedly victimized:
-Ma-usoh Malong, wife of activist Yaena Solaema (October 10,
2007)
-Sabawee Yapa (date not available)
-Munso Binsoh (November 5, 2007)
-Unidentified Bangkok Post Journalist (date not available)

JOHN